



Covenant Worship at Renewal Main Line

⁴ We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. ⁵ He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, ⁶ that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, ⁷ so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments (Psalm 78:4–7).

We believe that one of the direct implications of our commitment to obey Jesus' Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) is to make and train disciples of all nations, which includes the very people in our families such as our children. As such, one of the blessed times of our church is the witnessing of a baptism and incorporation of an infant into our church, also known as our covenant community. We believe that children, by virtue of believing parents are members of our church until they come to an age of discretion for public confession of their faith in Jesus Christ. Until then, the parents pledge in front of God and the church as witnesses, to bring up the child in the knowledge of God and the gospel (Book of Church Order, 56-4). These responsibilities include:

- that they teach the child to read the Word of God and instruct them the principles of the faith;
- that they pray with and for him/her;
- that they set an example of piety and godliness to bring up their child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The local congregation also pledges to undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of the child. The most evident way this takes place is in the inclusion of our children in corporate worship, which we also call *covenant worship*.¹ Hence, at Renewal, our children (Pre-school through 5th grade) participate in Sunday worship with their parents until the sermon, where they are then dismissed for their Sunday School lessons. Our youth (6th grade and above) remain with their parents for the remainder of the service. Some of our underlying convictions behind this include:

- **Teaching children the importance of corporate worship** - According to Scripture, the parents have primary spiritual responsibility to raise their children while the church comes alongside the parents to supplement and reinforce their discipleship.² Therefore, the time spent as a family during Sunday service is an opportunity for parents to teach and exemplify for their children "the most important thing you can ever train your child to do, [which is] worship. Worship is the only thing we get to do forever."³ We then worship

¹ This corporate worship includes our *covenantal* children based on God's promises that they receive benefits as members of the church including the watchful care and discipline of the church, except for admittance to the Lord's Table (see Genesis 17:7; Acts 2:39).

² Exodus 12:26-28; Deuteronomy 6:2-7; 16:11-15; Joel 2:15-16.

³ Robbie Castleman, *Parenting in the Pew*, 2002.

together because worship binds us to one another as one body (1 Cor. 12:12). Thus, our Sunday worship to God is not only an individual affair, but also a community affair, starting with the immediate family. Following this, children are to see themselves and their family as part of the larger body of God's covenant community comprised of people of all ages and backgrounds.

- **Exposing children to the reverence of God-honoring worship** - Sunday worship will be at least one hour out of 168 hours of the week where children can witness what John Piper calls, "maximum intensity of moving reference." There is nothing that can substitute the experience of a child witnessing his or her parent(s) engaging in authentic, Spirit-filled praise who cherish worshiping the Lord. The cumulative effect of weekly services witnessing this communion with God is of utmost importance as children grow into their adult years. We encourage parents to jealously desire to be the first and immediate examples of this kind of reverent worship to their children, rather than another person.
- **Having children receive weekly, means of grace** - God has ordained what we call, *ordinary means* of grace that the church exhibits during weekly Sunday worship. These include the Word, sacraments, and prayer. Although we recognize the practical benefits of having separate portions of the liturgy tailored specifically to children (e.g., a children's sermon), we trust in God's appointed means of grace that is administered to the *whole* body. We affirm that God calls *all* his people to worship him, including children when Jesus says in Mark 10:14, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God." Hence, do not feel embarrassed if your child makes noise during the service. If you feel it is overly distracting, you are welcome to step outside with your child to the cry room and return when deemed necessary.

Practical Suggestions for Parents

1. **Take time to assess your hearts and your attitudes toward worshiping with your children.** Are you viewing this time solely out of obligation and duty or seeing this as a God-given opportunity to spiritually impact your children? Pray for this Spirit-filled desire.
2. **Treasure and look forward to Sunday worship.** Stress the importance of weekly Sunday worship throughout the week and that this is a non-negotiable event so that children will develop a spiritual habit of prioritizing worship on the Sabbath.
3. **Prepare appropriately before Sunday service.** Dedicate a portion of Saturday night to prepare clothes, offering, and anything else that can help you get ready the next morning. During the car ride, intentionally talk about the previous Sunday's lessons, listen to praise music, and initiate spiritual conversation amongst the family. Before service begins, have children go to the bathroom and drink water to avoid interruptions.
4. **Explain the liturgy as they occur.** To supplement this document, there is another document explaining all the parts of our Sunday liturgy. Spend a night going over the various parts with your child and during the service, whisper to your child and explain the elements of the liturgy as they progress.
5. **Encourage participation throughout the liturgy.** Have children read along all or any words of the liturgy slides (e.g., Call to Worship, Confession). As your child learns the songs encourage them to sing along parts of the songs, as much as they are able to. During the announcements, point to the various events and have them follow along. If you have more than one child, ask other adults without children to sit near your family to help.
6. **Follow up after Sunday service.** Talk about the service on the way home. Discuss which praise songs they liked. Talk about their lessons or the sermon (for youth). Our

children's ministry will be studying passages from the same or similar series as the adults during their Sunday schools. Affirm children who behaved well during the service. Be clear about the expectations you have for your children during the service and about consequences. Discuss these with your spouse and be consistent in follow through.

Word of Encouragement

Parents, we know that this is not an easy task. All the more, we need to ask the Holy Spirit to help us engage in this calling to disciple our children. It is only God who can change hearts and grow a spiritual desire in your children. Our job as parents is simply to be faithful in ministering to our children and showing them Jesus. When your child is disruptive during service, do not be embarrassed. Everyone at our church is understanding and knows that this is a long-term process that requires patience, repetition, and trust. Yet we trust and rest in God who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us (Eph. 3:20).

Youth Group Ministry at Renewal Main Line

The following supplements Renewal's overall vision of Covenant Worship with our children and youth. Before you continue, please familiarize yourself with the earlier part of this document explaining Covenant Worship.

At Renewal, graduating 5th grade students begin a series of catechism lessons before their junior high school year. Our pastors and teachers will go through the theological foundations required for a correct understanding of the Christian faith as reflected in the Westminster Shorter Catechism.⁴ Beginning the fall semester of their 6th grade year, they will sit throughout the whole duration of our Sunday service along with other junior high and high school students. When the parents and the student feel that he or she is ready to make a public profession of faith, they will inform the pastor who will then coordinate an interview with the student to affirm his or her knowledge and Christian experience of the gospel. Afterwards, the student will be received into the body of believers at Renewal as a communicating member with all the benefits including admittance to the Lord's Table and voting privileges of the church.

The major underlying convictions in having students worship with their parents are a continuation of what was presented earlier regarding Covenant Worship. The same biblical convictions apply for our youth—namely, that the parents are the primary spiritual authority over their children. The parents then are responsible in discipling their children as they transition into adulthood while the church comes behind the parents to help facilitate this parent-child relationship.

Here are some considerations that distinctly mark the youth students apart from children who are in K-5th grade:

1. **Youth students are in period of transition into adulthood.** Youth students are in a *transitional* time of their spiritual lives where they preparing to enter adulthood. The implication is that once they are able to make a credible profession of faith and are admitted as full members of the church, they will then be under the spiritual authority of the Session. Therefore, the decision in having the youth join all parts of the service are based off the conviction that they need to be exposed, be familiarized, and be adjusted to worshipping with other adults in the congregation. We see the whole of Sunday services as an opportunity for parents to prepare their youth for participation in services comprised of adults, including the ministry of the Word through preaching and witnessing of the Sacraments.
 - a. One of the realities of incoming college students is that many of them do not have a high priority in joining a local church. Rather than submitting to the spiritual authority of a local church provided through the administration of the Sacraments and church discipline, students are prone to look for campus ministries that are tailored for like-minded, college students—in other words, a “youth group-like” experience for college students. While we encourage and support these ministries, such as our very own college ministry (RCF), college students have the tendency to not join a local church along with its diverse members of all backgrounds and ages. This results in a form of two congregations within one church: a college congregation and the adult congregation without much relational interaction between the two. One of the ways

⁴ A confessional document that covers the major tenets of the Reformed Christian tradition in question and answer form. This teaching tool was composed for the catechesis (teaching) of new converts for the eventual membership into their local church.

- we can prepare our students for a high view of the local church is by training them to worship with the diverse members within our congregation.
- b. While we recognize that God in the past has faithfully revealed himself to many students primarily through their youth group ministries, those incidences are not the *normative* means that God has prescribed in Scripture for the spiritual discipleship of children. We acknowledge that there are testimonies of students who came to faith through their youth group ministries and without parents' spiritual involvement. However, there are many *more* testimonies of college students who have struggled in their faith because they could not find a community of college peers like that of their youth group. Such students are those who have a difficult time incorporating themselves into a local church.
2. **The goal of Sunday is not learning, but worship.** Please refer to the introductory anecdote in the earlier portion of this section. The motivating factor for youth students' attendance to Sunday service is not solely driven by the accumulation of biblical knowledge. Hence, their worship experience should not be solely dependent on if they can understand all of the preacher's sermon but rather, the *experience* of worship that they participate in *with their parents*. The experience of worshipping with their parents week-in and week-out is what will be most memorable for the youth as they transition into college ministries and churches. Furthermore, listening to the same sermon with their parents provides the best means for parent and student to engage in spiritual conversation. It also holds the parents accountable to train their students how to listen to sermons.
- a. We understand and sympathize with the difficulty of younger youth students in being able to comprehend the sermon but we believe that the benefits will outweigh the inconveniences. Be reminded that this is a time of training and the art of listening to sermon takes practice. Especially in an age with information being delivered in soundbytes and social-media, it is an invaluable skill for the youth to learn how to follow along the exposition of a sermon. And even though they may not grasp all of the sermons' points and exposition, we believe that they will, over time, be shaped by the preaching of the Word as Isaiah 55:11 states, "*So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.*"
 - b. There are examples of both students with and without youth groups doing spiritually well in their college years. This reveals that the determining factor of their continued spiritual growth is not the availability of a separate youth group service on Sundays but rather a student's (1) understanding of Scripture and how to *apply Scripture* to life and (2) the ability to worship with people from all ages and backgrounds. We believe having the youth participate in the whole of our Sunday services best prepares them as such by having the parents and their youth listen to the same message within a diverse congregation.
3. **Youth Group Gatherings** - While we recommend the youth to worship with their parents throughout the whole of service, we also recognize the benefits of our students establishing spiritual relationships with their peers. Hence, Renewal has Youth Group Meetings on Friday or Saturdays among students 6th grade up. Smaller discussion groups are broken up between junior high and high school students. These discussions and studies will be led by youth group teachers along with our youth group pastor. In addition, there are monthly events for fellowship and opportunities to invite friends.